

# The English Leaflet

THE ENGLISH LEAFLET is published at Boston, by the New England Association of Teachers of English. Subscription price, One Dollar. Secretary-Treasurer, A. Bertram DeMille, Winthrop, Massachusetts. Editor, Charles Swain Thomas, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

Vol. XXV

MAY, 1926

MAY 5 1926

Number 222

## PREVENTIVE MEASURES—AND THE ENGLISH CONSULTANT

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### I

The primary aim of wise supervision is the improvement of teaching. That is well established. But the method by which adequate results may be obtained is still a problem, especially in the field of English. Take, for instance, the secondary school of 500-1000 pupils. A paid supervisor is out of the question—the School Board has said it. Mayhap the school principal is interested in mathematics or science and gives little attention to English. The teaching force is a floating population with raw recruits straight from college, with an occasional candidate shifted from a small town high school during the school year. The head of the English Department is often a fixture with five classes of his own to engineer, with the responsibility of a class play, graduation exercises, a debating team, and a dozen and one administrative problems to engage and divert his attention. He has no incentive to add another burden, that of systematically aiding the young teacher.

Into this situation are dumped possibly four out of the six English teachers in a department. Classes which average twenty-five recitation hours a week and which total 125-175 pupils are apportioned by the principal. The so-called teaching begins. In some schools there is not even a course of study to aid the novice, or if there is one, it is so antiquated or indefinite as to be of little use. No one who has not earnestly faced the same situation can ever realize the tremendous waste in such a system. Let me step into the personal for a moment.

When I first began teaching in a high school of 800 pupils, I asked for a course of study. After weeks of persistent inquiry met by evasions I concluded that there was no course of study. As I had three Grade IX classes in addition to two Grade XI divisions, it was most important for me to know what preparation my pupils had had in previous grades. After herculean labors a conference consisting of the Superintendent of Schools, the principal of the high school, the head of the high-school English department, and the grammar-school principals was called at City Hall. There was some discussion, hampered by the high-school attitude, "You are not preparing our boys and girls for high-school English," and the grade attitude, "You of the high school know nothing about the elementary school and expect too much." All agreed that a course of study from the sixth to the twelfth grade would be of inestimable benefit to all concerned. That was years ago. National courses, State courses, City courses have come and gone. That local course has never materialized. I have seen young teachers stay and leave—stay if they could keep the children from throwing spit-balls, leave if they demanded the principal's time to quell the uproar.

It is true that there is an awakening sense of responsibility in many cities. Some even allow for a time of apprenticeship, when a new teacher spends part of the time teaching and part of the time observing in other classes, thus becoming gradually acclimated. It is true that there is a tendency to require practice-teaching courses in some colleges. If a teacher is to be more than a monitor, if teaching is to be worth the demand for higher wages, if the present terrific waste is to be eliminated, some supervision other than mere inspection by administrative officers must be offered.

Mr. William H. Burton, in his book *Supervision and the Improvement of Teaching*, has given a practical answer to the question, "What is Supervision?"

"The superintendent of a certain town spends a considerable part of his time in reading current educational periodicals and in reviewing professional books as they appear. He examines carefully and critically such grade texts as come to his desk. He attends most of the professional gatherings in his locality and brings to his own system as many prominent



speakers as he can obtain. His aim is to collect all the material possible that bears directly upon the improving of classroom procedure among his teachers. Frequent meetings are held at which the teachers discuss what has been presented previously, or material to which they have been referred. Free discussion is encouraged at these meetings and many of the suggestions made are put into effect. Frequent visits are made to the classrooms followed by conferences on the problems of pedagogy, of classification and grading, of discipline, etc. The sum total of these activities, briefly outlined here, this superintendent calls supervision."

How may these principles be applied? First, in every secondary school there should be some one teacher, qualified by experience with local conditions, knowledge of subject-matter, and sympathy with the difficulties of young teachers, who should act in the capacity of English Consultant. He should have no power of rating teachers, but should be relieved of other duties in order to have time to keep regular office hours each week for consultation with teachers new in his department, and to give himself whole-heartedly to the fulfilling of certain other requirements. It would be his business to supply the novice with a course of study for that particular school, and to be ready to show how the course might be adapted for classes differing in mentality—in other words, to point out how the subject-matter might be used as a minimum, and as a stimulus toward a maximum. It would be his task to see that certain publications were known to every teacher—for instance, the U. S. Government pamphlet *The Reorganization of English in the Secondary Schools*; the British Government pamphlet *The Teaching of English in England*; the *English Leaflet* of the New England Association of Teachers of English; the *Illinois Bulletin*; the *English Journal*, published by the University of Chicago press. Every experienced teacher is perfectly familiar with these publications, as he is familiar with such books as Chubb's *The Teaching of English*, Thomas's *The Teaching of English in the Secondary Schools*, Stratton's *The Teaching of English in the High School*. Inglis, Parker, Leonard, McMurtry, Baker (of the 47 Workshop), Thurber, Phelps, Sharp, Hosic and numerous other leaders need no introduction to the veteran.

The English Consultant might urge correspondence courses, extension courses, Saturday courses if near a college centre, summer courses. He should keep publishers' lists and announcements of interesting lectures, plays, and concerts circulating. He should establish a special library shelf devoted to recent publications—I can think of a half-dozen books that helped me in the last month's work: *The Century Vocabulary Builder* by Greever and Bachelor; *First Book in English* by Murray and Wiles; *English Problems in the Solving* by Simons; *A Study of the Types of Literature* by Rich; *Every Teacher's Problems* by Stark. None of this material, however, should be compulsory. If the Consultant required an immediate review of these books, acting as a training teacher, the end would be defeated. Let these books sift into the hands of apprentices from time to time. Let the adviser mark a certain passage that will help a particular teacher on a special problem. Let him do a little guiding in the swift currents.

## II

One of the greatest helps for young teachers is a careful study of the examination paper. First, a file of the teacher's own examination papers becomes in time a record of achievement; then a collection of those given by other teachers in the same school, later in surrounding cities. The College Board Press publishes a set of questions and answers, an enlightening pamphlet for beginners even if veterans may sigh; Relfe Brothers, Ltd., in London publishes an extremely valuable set of Oxford, Cambridge, and University of London examination questions and answers which may be procured at trifling cost.

Tests and measurements also should not be neglected, but usually these are better left for experts. The Head of the Department or the English Consultant might make out monthly tests that would help the beginner to measure his own teaching progress—tests of what the children ought to know, the results to be conned only by the teacher in charge. Intelligent novices are quick to realize their mistakes and are often frank about their failures, provided their classes are not compared with other classes and held up to ridicule by blundering officials. And there is such an infinite variety



of tests: (a) definite spelling lists, e. g. "For this month see what percent your C division is able to make in the Miller Hundred Worst Words;" (b) definite punctuation sets, e. g. "Try R. W. Brown's paragraph of sixty-four words, or five or ten sentences stressing possessives;" (c) model sentences to be memorized: (d) memory selections to form the core of a year's work and yet not exclude free choice.

Let the Consultant walk in some dull morning with a cheery "You've just finished *Julius Caesar*. How would you like to try this one-word test of fifty questions? I'll leave it with you, and I shall be interested to know what you think of the questions." Or, "I saw this vocabulary test in a new book I was reading last week. You might like to try it." Or again, "You have John Siekierka in your class. If you find him troublesome, lend him my copy of *Captain Blood* or *The Mutineers*."

Typewritten circulars sent around at irregular intervals (for the shirker must never be tolerated) are often stimulating. They may take some such form as the following:

Have you noticed in recent periodicals and textbooks the awakening interest in the use of models—model sentences, model paragraphs, model themes? Are you using simple, stimulating models with an appeal to the emotions? Wouldn't your class enjoy a good laugh? Or have you the frivolous type that ought to be stirred deeply? As you are an expert with your pupils and know their needs best, couldn't you yourself write some good models for them to use? Consult the February, 1923, number of the *English Leaflet*. On the table in room 106 are a number of notebooks containing clippings from the Contributor's Club of the *Atlantic Monthly* and other sources. All of this material has been chosen with the children's interest in mind. If you find other delightful bits, will you pass them on, and thus increase our supply of models? Here's about what we might reasonably expect from one of our ninth graders:

#### THE MIDWINTER PRIZE DRILL—and GAFFNEY

The sixteen-piece jazz orchestra whipped out the last measure of *Carolina in the Morning*. The eight picked men of Taunton Cadets, Company A, marched on to the floor amid the clapping of happy parents and friends. Would little Gaffney get first prize? "Present AR-R-Rms! Shoulder AR-R-MS!" The voice of Major Macadam boomed on through the Manual. Gaffney's drilling was a marvel, but he was going to lose. I knew instinctively that there was something radically wrong. The other competitors were alert, tense, or wooden, but Gaffney's face was an agony of appeal. His mother felt it too. I tried not

to see her white lips moving. He had been so set upon winning. Five minutes, ten minutes, twenty minutes. Would it never end? I dared not look back at the line. Should I rush out there and stop that ceaseless shouldering and reshouldering of guns? Did cadets ever drop dead of exhaustion?

The judges conferred. The hall was silent as a desert in noon-day heat. Then, with a burst of enthusiasm long repressed, the spectators applauded the dismissal of Company A and awaited the award of prizes. The superintendent of schools stepped out into the midst of the great shining floor space and started to drone provokingly. Plagues of Egypt! Why was it necessary to dwell upon all those platitudes? Suddenly a familiar name struck my ears: "The first prize is awarded to—Private Gaffney." A hum of approval swept the hall. In my delirium of happiness I hugged his mother openly. A few minutes later the first-prize winner slid up to us. He showed wild joy.

"What under the sun——?" I began.

"Say," he interrupted. "In the middle of the drill my garter busted, but it held. Yay, bo, it's held up to now. Say, moms, under the circumstances I don't have to dance with Cousin Eva, do I? Cause it might come down. Tut-Tut! I'm a lucky nut!"

And that's the last we saw of him until the dancing was over.

### III

"These children are in a parlous state," says the practitioner to the Consultant. "What would you advise now?" It takes a resourceful mind to recall on the instant the thousand and one devices in daily use, but it can be done. Précis-writing, the enlargement of the active vocabulary, a glance at a new list of theme topics, a set of themes to be read, graded, and corrected by pupils before reaching the teacher, the working out of a community problem, the analysis of Palmer's *Self-Cultivation in English*, the reading of a humorous story like *The Ransom of Red Chief*, the recital of Kipling's *Barrack-Room Ballads*, Masfield's *One of the Bosun's Yarns*, or, if the mood changes, Daudet's *The Death of the Dauphin*, and the presentation of Percival Wilde's play, *The Traitor*, will prove effective.

Above all, the Consultant ought to have an ever-ready supply of lesson-plans based upon the texts actually used in his own school. If a beginner be required to teach Keats's *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, teach it he must. But the results! To those who have trodden that path before, the pitfalls are obvious. A lesson-plan or at least a few suggestions may guide the hopelessly lost. Stenographic reports of class



recitations are invaluable—to be given to the teacher, not wafted office-ward, except in the case of experienced demonstrators who allow their lessons to serve as models. Advance records of each month's work required from all teachers and kept on file for the use of all undoubtedly help. Monthly Round Table conferences held in a spirit of coöperation and with every effort toward free and informal discussion may deal with some special problem to be assigned at least a week beforehand. "What appreciable gain? What obstacles?" may reveal difficulties unsuspected.

Too often superiors are concerned with the speedy elimination of the unfit in their department rather than with the gradual improvement of ineffective but promising material. Granted the apprentice is a pitiful bungler, always seeking some new activity rather than developing the material at hand, let him realize, however, that he is not the center of the universe, that the chief concern is the progress of the children, that each child presents an individual case, that the prompt recognition of defects, the wise application of cures, and the cultivation of a sympathetic atmosphere for the normal growth of the child is first and last the teacher's business. Disaster may be averted by careful preventive measures.

Educators agree that pupils properly taught must have a knowledge and appreciation of literature with the ability to interpret, the ability to write, the ability to speak, the ability to think. Do our teachers reach this attainment? What right has a man or woman to set himself or herself up as a teacher of *Julius Caesar* and be totally ignorant of *Coriolanus* and *Antony and Cleopatra*? What literary taste has a teacher who prefers cheap best sellers to Thomas Hardy and John Galsworthy? Can our young teachers write two consecutive paragraphs of simple prose fit for publication? If the need comes in the community, can they be called upon to face an audience of two or three hundred and speak with clarity and sincerity? Are they reasonably well versed in the best traditions of music, painting, sculpture, history, and drama? Do they have a love for the English tongue? An intrepid examiner once asked a class to define "the best type of English teacher", and this reply was shot from an alert

boy on the back seat: "One who knows a lot about books and a lot more about boys".

A year ago a certain new edition of essays containing selections from Newman, Arnold, Huxley, Ruskin, and Carlyle was assigned to an extension group of forty experienced teachers. A vote was taken, and thirty teachers objected to the work because they failed to understand the reading matter well enough to make simple summaries of the essays. "I can't understand one word in that book", volunteered one, and the majority confirmed her statement to be true in their own cases. No doubt the average teacher would scorn the implication here. But as an actual fact, can he or she read standard works—with real intelligence? And if not, why attempt to teach and create havoc in our schools?

Some day the colleges may send out teachers equipped with scholarship and with a never-failing supply of encouragement, enthusiasm, and inspiration. Until then every available means should be provided to give our experienced-teachers-of-tomorrow less patronage and better opportunities. For good teachers we must have.

"The morale of the teaching staff today is in need of food," asserts William Trufant Foster in the *Atlantic*: "Not that a majority of teachers are starving, but all teachers are hungering for what is to them the bread of life: the means of professional growth, books, lectures, magazines, social intercourse, university summer schools, occasional travel to conventions and to centres of the best in music, art, drama, and religion. They need just such perspective as this, so that the academic molehill of routine tasks will not obscure their view of the mountain heights of ultimate achievement."

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## DESECRATION?

LILLIAN FOSTER COLLINS

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Four and a half years ago, I, very young, very inexperienced, and very recently out of college—three months to be exact—undertook the well-nigh impossible task (I realize it now) of teaching English and the classics in a school composed almost entirely of Polish children and children of Polish parents.



I say impossible not because of the fact that scarcely a child in each class of thirty-five to fifty pupils can speak English without a pronounced foreign accent and that statistically the particular group of children from which we draw our pupils ranks mentally, and morally, the lowest of any foreign student group in the city. I say it because of the fact that I was so hopelessly unready to handle the situation and that, like so many beginners, I became immediately bent on reform and uplift. My mission, as I perceived it,—that of making well-spoken and well-conducted citizens out of these hundreds of immigrant children and children of immigrant parents through the medium of our heritage in language and literature,—was by no means erroneously perceived, but my method was decidedly so.

The first term, I barely covered a quarter of the assignment, so busy was I delaying each day's lesson to correct bad pronunciations and wretched slang. And what was worse, I frightened away the little articulateness my pupils possessed by my exacting standard. This was true in the technical training I tried to give them, and this fault, unfortunately, was carried over into the literature lessons. I could arouse absolutely no response in them to what I considered the beauties of *The Vision of Sir Launfal*, *David Copperfield*, etc. And why? Because I was so intent upon breaking down what seemed to me such gross errors that I was destroying their only means of responding to anything—that of trying to translate these utterly unfamiliar experiences and modes of expression into experiences and language of their own. And I was not giving them a new and better means.

It took me a long time to see that this atrocious, as it seemed to me, Polish-American jargon would have to be the basis for the more aesthetic thing later on. And, strangely enough, it was one of my own much-corrected pupils who made me see.

I had been trying painfully, to both myself and my class of academically dull and over-age boys and girls, to get the pupils to appreciate the romantic and poetic appeal of Scott's *Lochinvar*. For two days, they sat looking stolidly at me without a ray of interest or even, as it seemed to me, of under-

standing on their faces. Romantic poetry meant absolutely nothing in their meagre lives. Finally, in despair, I dismissed form and aesthetic appeal and undertook to review the narrative matter once more, to be sure that they had mastered that at least. Duly and dully, they replied with considerable but absolutely disinterested accuracy to the questions I asked concerning the story of the poem. Then I put a question to them that I had evidently not asked the day before.

"Did the fair Ellen need much persuading to go off with the young *Lochinvar* on his horse?"

Up shot a hand in the rear of the room. It belonged to the oldest and dullest—in things academic, not worldly—boy in the class.

"Yes, Stanislav," I urged, with some misgivings, for it was the first time he had volunteered in the two months that he had sat in my class.

"Did she need much persuading? I'll say she didn't," he twinkled—yes, actually twinkled—back at me. "'One touch to her hand, and one word in her ear,'" he quoted. "He said, 'Comin', kid?' and she came."

My sensibilities were considerably shocked, but my sense of humor was considerably stirred, too, and the latter got the better of me. I laughed. The class laughed, and before I realized it, Scott was being translated into their twentieth-century Polish-American jargon and, praise be, was being appreciated. Before the hour was over, my pupils, no longer inarticulate for fear of the frown of distaste they might cause on the countenance of their teacher, were wholeheartedly reproducing *Lochinvar* for their own enjoyment and understanding.

And then I realized where the trouble was and how I could remedy it. Now these little Polish-Americans are allowed to interpret and enjoy my precious classics to the fullness of their imperfect imagination and more imperfect English and I am no longer made wholly unhappy when Albie Shienkiewicz blithely tells me that "Mr. Murdstone was *de sheik* that double-crossed Mrs. Copperfield", for she is well on the way toward interpreting Dickens with the only comprehension she has now. And eventually, with constant and fear-



less association with him and the other impeccables of the past, and present, too, she will be able to attain a larger comprehension and a little more elegant expression, perhaps.

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## THE TEACHER TAKES A LESSON

JOHN W. CURE

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A certain young instructor in English composition once conceived a bright idea—one of those flashes of inspiration which come so frequently to the inexperienced while learning the ways of the classroom. *He* would teach the subject with two-edged efficiency by requiring composition on the points and principles to be learned. This method would give his pupils practice in writing, at the same time it pounded in a knowledge of the rules.

The first subject of study introduced by the textbook was the paragraph. The treatment of the subject advised the pupil to master the most common form before attempting practice of the others. That form outlined the paragraph as an essential unit of thought introduced by a topic sentence at or near the beginning, expanded, explained, and amplified in detail by the subordinate and developing sentences which compose the paragraph group. The instructor's plan required from the class an exposition on the subject: *How to Write One Type of Paragraph*. To make certain that both edges of his scheme should be keen and cutting he insisted that the composition be a single paragraph exemplifying the teaching of the textbook. No room for loose and rambling structure in *that* assignment! The plan was air-tight. Certainly many of the old characteristic errors would be unable to squeeze into these themes like unbidden guests through narrow and closely guarded portals. With keen anticipation he awaited inspection of results.

From class next day the ingenious neophyte bore an ample sheaf of papers. He cuddled them under his arm as he would have carried a prized possession. Down the long arcade he swept with the spirit of mastery in every stride. Conscious achievement perched upon his brow. He hurried—as much as dignity would permit. The seclusion of his study beck-

oned with promised proof of his instructorial merit.

Alone at last, he settled down to read with much the air he wore on leisure evenings when about to begin the perusal of some tale of known interest or the study of a favorite classic. The first theme proved uninteresting and was dropped rather carelessly upon the floor. The second followed swiftly, propelled by a gesture of impatience. The third was longer, and its reading spread an obscuring cloud over that expression of conscious achievement which had ridden so serenely on the homeward-bound face. Others followed the first three with increasing speed until the action became a frantic search for something precious that had been lost. The last paper fluttered hopelessly to the floor, and the young instructor lapsed into long and profound study of a blank wall.

All had come!—every one of those old errors the new plan was intended to exclude! They not only came to the party but they behaved with swaggering impudence and an exaggerated strut that made the teacher wonder if their presence marked concerted action by the class in an expression of revolt. The limit of brevity was present in the three-sentence product of a dour and reticent boy: "The paragraph is a group of sentences expressing one main thought. Avoid including more than one topic sentence or topic idea in a single paragraph. The paragraph should end in conformity with the beginning." Other papers represented all degrees of amplification and ramification up to that of the garrulous girl who sprayed several pages with her word-spout, and then flung at the result a careless handful of punctuation much as one might throw shot against a blackboard. The boy wrote one paragraph as directed. Most of the others wrote one paragraph. The garrulous girl wrote every rule and principle of composition she knew, including some the instructor had not previously met, but she crammed them all into the required one paragraph!

Gradually over the blank wall spread a model paragraph for the next day's lesson. Topic sentence, definition of terms, methods of development, the ending which reflected thought to the beginning—all were there in proper place, connected by a series of sentences made up of interlocking terms which



carried the topic thought through close coherence to the pre-determined end. He would make them think out with him each of those sentence steps before he wrote it on the board, the better to impress the method on their minds. Then they should study and analyze the model and try the same assignment once again.

When the harvest of the second assignment came, he reaped a replica of that model on the board, paraphrased in spots. Followed more study of the wall. Mural contemplation became a habit as successive trials of his plan on subject after subject consistently returned compositions of lower grade than any of his sections wrote before that inspiration flashed across his mind. Slowly but surely the writing on the wall condemned the plan. It had to be abandoned. But he continued to study the wall, to read if possible the reasons why the plan had failed, and to discover means for the improvement of his teaching. He finally perceived that his classes were not seeing composition as in any way related to life. It was to them simply a mental exercise through which instructors forced them. Unity, coherence, and emphasis were wholly unrelated to consciousness, the sequence and relation of events and of thoughts, and the proportions and relative position of importance of objects and events in daily life. This perception caused a reversal of the plan. The teacher's task became the problem of fitting the rule to life rather than of fitting life to the rule. Thenceforth his classes wrote on interests of their own, and he tried to show the writers that rules were only aids to life and to expressions of the interests of life. He tried to talk in concrete terms and to illustrate his rules and teachings with simple experiences common to all his pupils.

The new plan worked better, but it was more difficult than the old. It did not allow the teacher to administer a dose of rules and then recline while waiting for the medicine to work. It was not a panacea. It was a plan of growth through common study, the pupils and the teacher working together. It kept him studying his favorite wall until the habit had become firmly fixed. But blank walls, after all, are not such bleak and barren areas. They reveal much, both interesting and valuable, once we learn to read them.

The following bibliography is continued from the March issue:

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